

**Federal Autism Activities:
Funding for Research Has Increased, but Agencies Need to Resolve
Surveillance Challenges**

In a July 19, 2006 report to Senate Majority Leader, William H. Frist, M.D., the General Accountability Office (GAO) evaluates federal autism activities and identifies remaining challenges in preparation to reauthorize the autism provisions of the Children's Health Act of 2000. The Children's Health Act, drafted by Senators Frist and Kennedy, was the first bill to direct federal research on autism and autism spectrum disorder.

GAO Findings in Brief

- Federal funding for autism research has increased as a result of the Children's Health Act of 2000.
- Coordination of federal autism activities have increased as a result of the Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee created by the Children's Health Act of 2000.
- Research activities at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have been developed to meet the requirements of the Children's Health Act of 2000.

Yet GAO Identifies that Challenges Remain:

- Coordination of federal autism activities can be further improved, including coordination of NIH research.
- Research efforts should be continued and expanded to: identify the cause of autism, improve the evaluation and early identification of children with autism spectrum disorder and develop evidenced-based treatments for people with autism spectrum disorder.
- Surveillance of autism and developmental disabilities can be improved through better coordination and resolving interagency barriers.
- States need to develop strategies for coordinating state education agencies and other state agencies to fund interventions and transition services for individuals with autism spectrum disorders
- Strategy to address the shortage of health professional trained to serve individuals with autism spectrum disorders

The Combating Autism Act (S.843) introduced by Senator Santorum, reauthorizes the Children's Health Act of 2000. It was recently reported unanimously from the Senate Health Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. This bill seeks to address the remaining challenges identified by GAO.